

## **Prevalence of sexual harassment in university students of a public higher education institution in Ecuador**

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### **Summary**

#### **Introduction**

At present, sexual harassment in higher education institutions is a problem that is increasingly visible, presenting invasive behaviors for both men and women, so efforts should be focused on eradicating these unwanted experiences.

#### **Objective**

To describe the situations of sexual harassment that students of a higher education institution have experienced.

#### **Methods**

This is a descriptive cross-sectional investigation where a non-probabilistic sample of 3731 students from Ecuadorian public universities was evaluated, previously validated and collected from 22 cases of verbal, non-verbal, physical sexual harassment, abuse of power and blackmail, to which sociodemographic aspects and closed questions about bullying in the student environment were evaluated.

### **Results**

The incidence of sexual harassment within the classrooms of a university in Ecuador was identified, having an association with some sociodemographic factors and aspects of permanence in the university, which gives an indication of the current situation for decision-making.

### **Conclusions**

The findings allow us to clearly visualize what is being raised within the institution in order to provide solutions to a problem that is deeply rooted in society.

**Keys Words:** Sexual Harassment. Gender-Based Violence. Sexual Behavior

## **Introduction**

In the literature there are several definitions about sexual harassment, among others this the presence of a series of behaviors of a sexual nature, explicit or implicit that are so offensive to the person who receives it, and can be in different ways such as jokes or repeated insinuations by any means of communication, non-consensual physical contact, humiliating language, among others; Manifestation is also of a more aggressive nature such as threats and demands for sexual purposes (1).

The concept of gender-based violence is used as a framework for understanding gender-based harassment, sexual harassment, sexual assault, violence and other forms of gender-based violence. In other words, sexual harassment is part of a continuum of different actual and potential forms of gender-based violence and knowledge about sexualized violence, power and unequal gender conditions were replaced by an individualistic and legislative version of sexual harassment exposure. In the field of international research on sexual harassment and the development of concepts and boundaries has been quite similar, and research there is a significant lack of internal training in institutions on sexual harassment, causing much confusion on this issue (2).

Globally, significant changes have been made to laws in an effort to achieve gender equality and to reduce sexual harassment. This has meant an evolution in the treatment and prevention of sexual harassment and sexual harassment, but even with these regulations, up to 87% of women still suffer abuse, verbal and psychological, According to Klein et al. (2021), victims present internal conflicts due to the intimidating, degrading or offensive environment, even leading to consider shame within their social environment that can be triggered by the appearance of traumatic symptoms and stress. when victims are not handled properly(3).

Spain, for example, has made significant changes to its laws in an effort to reduce sexual harassment. These changes began with the approval of the Organic Law on Measures for Comprehensive Protection against Gender Violence (LO 1/2004, of December 28, 2004), and a few years later the Organic Law for Effective Equality between Women and Men was approved (LO 3/2007, of March 22, 2007). These innovative regulations facilitate the daily coexistence of respect and equity.

In Ecuador according to INEC (2014), one in three women has suffered sexual harassment, of which 54% of cases of abuse or sexual violence occurred by people close to the victim, this means that they were relatives, teachers, senior chiefs, pastors, and or cult leaders, which indicates that the patriarchal culture, Gender violence, discrimination and sexism are determining factors in sexual harassment, the cognitive development of these women who

suffer from harassment is impaired attention and perception is distorted trigger several disorders that affect their quality of life, most of the women who are affected are the most vulnerable, this is where the situation becomes inevitable, and in the economic field it can increase desertion, absenteeism and dissatisfaction, negatively impacting the professional achievement of women and the advancement of their university careers(4).

Although gender violence in Ecuador was positioned since the mid-80s, sexual harassment in the university environment has been a reserved subject and with taboos before free research, during the last decade there were several considerable changes, with current research that provide new perspectives and figures completely different from those of the existing bibliography, and data are sought in minorities and commonplaces, applying theories on violence and the organizational structure of institutions (5).

With respect to the laws and regulations in force in Ecuador, comprehensive policies, mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation are established; to establish measures for the prevention, attention, protection and comprehensive reparation of victims and is applied in the Organic Integral Penal Code (COIP), (6) in its article 166, it states that those who commit harassment of sexual harassment and acts of psychological violence against women must pay from 60 days to three years in prison depending on the severity of the injuries caused, as well as the re-education of the aggressor is intended as long as the rights of the person attacked are being guaranteed and protected by law so that he can have a life free of violence (7).

Higher education in our country is a multifaceted phenomenon in modern society, combining a variety of institutions and a growing diversity of students, a range of purposes and functions, and different orientations, in this area reside in higher education systems a type of violence that has been defined by experts as a hidden problem, Due to the lack of knowledge on the subject and the small number of complaints that are made, it has serious consequences for students and staff in terms of physical, psychological and professional effects in the short and long term, since more than half of students and teachers who experience sexual harassment do not report the facts to the authorities, action that focuses on the different intersection dimensions in relation to sexual harassment in higher education in a limited way and despite being denounced by several social groups such as students, parents, different staff of the institution, younger women, women with precarious working conditions and certain minorities (ethnic and sexual) are more exposed to sexual harassment than other groups (8).

The present investigative work refers to the cases presented at the Polytechnic School of Chimborazo with their respective extensions in different provinces of Ecuador, where the existence of significant figures in the variables analyzed in the current educational environment is evident, which aims to indicate to the scientific community with results taken from the daily environment and sow a precedent to carry out a research process Future that facilitates a situational diagnosis with internal and external factors of sexual harassment in the Ecuadorian university community.

Once the existing problems have been analyzed, the research carried out aims to analyze the different situations of sexual harassment that can arise at the level of higher education, as a latent social and ethical problem in society, and at the same time it is intended to determine the responsibility as institutions before the protection of the rights of students who are part of a society where values have been lost and an equid is sought. D free of sexual violence and of all kinds i.e. higher education must become more involved in these situations and properly handle this problem.

## Methods

A cross-sectional descriptive research was conducted in a stratified non-probabilistic sample of (n=3731) of students of a public university in Ecuador, to whom the Survey of Sexual Harassment in Higher Education Institutions (ASIES) was applied, with the authorization of the authors of the previously validated measurement instrument.

The study variables correspond to: whether you have ever experienced a situation of sexual harassment while studying at university and its characteristics such as: sex, gender, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity, area of origin, number of children and disability.

The survey in the computerized version was applied through the use of institutional virtual platforms. It was considered a criterion of inclusion to the study, that they were legally enrolled students from the third semester at the time of application, it was coordinated with the authorities of each faculty and career for its application, and publications were made with the link of the survey in the social networks of the institution. The investigation began in October 2020 and its prosecution was completed in December 2021.

The data were processed with the use of Jamovi statistical software and the main summary measures are the frequencies, percentages and measures of association for qualitative variables, in this case the statistician Chi square and Student's t for quantitative variables.

Ethical principles for research with human subjects were complied with, all participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the confidentiality and use of the resulting information only for the purposes of the study, anonymity and voluntary nature of their participation was ensured; its link to the study was through the acceptance and signing of free and informed consent and included the revocation of consent, as well as an emotional containment protocol if needed; the members of the Sexualities Research Group (GIS) in charge of the study, signed a confidentiality agreement.

## Results

Below are the results of the survey conducted with a population of 3731 university students from the city of Riobamba, Francisco de Orellana and Macas. Table 1 presents the absolute and relative values of the survey conducted regarding whether you have ever suffered sexual harassment according to the province of study.

Where of the total number of students surveyed, 80.2% belong to students from the city of Riobamba, central area of the Ecuadorian highlands, 15.4% and 4.4% of the students correspond to the Headquarters in the cities of Francisco de Orellana and Macas respectively, an area of the Amazon of the country.

With regard to whether he has suffered sexual harassment, a population of 887 students from the province of Chimborazo corresponding to 89.59%, 72 students from the province of Francisco de Orellana 7.28% and 31 students from the province of Morona Santiago was determined. On the other hand, the students who have not suffered sexual harassment, 2106 students belong to the province of Chimborazo corresponding to 76.83%, 502 students from the province of Francisco de Orellana 18.32% and 133 students from the province of Morona Santiago with 4.85%. The result of the Chi-square test allows us to identify a statistically significant association between the variables ( $p=0.000$ ).

**Table 1** Absolute and relative values of students who have ever suffered sexual harassment while at this university according to province of studies

Province in which you study	Have ever experienced sexual harassment				Total	
	No		Yes		Frequency	%
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%		
Chimborazo (matrix)	2106	76.83	887	89.59	2993	80.2
Francisco de Orellana	502	18.32	72	7.28	574	15.4
Morona Santiago	133	4.85	31	3.13	164	4.4
Total	2741	100	990	100	3731	100

$X^2 = 77.306; p = 0,000$

Table 2 presents the absolute values and relative values if students have suffered any situation of sexual harassment in the university according to the student's residence, where it was determined that of the total number of students found 41.11% their residence is in the same city of the Institution, 12.18% reside elsewhere in the same province and 46.71% reside in another province. With respect to the residence of the respondents related to some presence of sexual harassment, it is observed that the place of residence with the highest presence of sexual harassment are 523 students residing in other provinces with 53.64%, followed by 366 students residing in the same city of the IES with 37.54% and finally 86 students residing elsewhere in the same province with 8.82%. Observing the result of the Chi-square test identifies a statistically significant association between student residence and sexual harassment ( $p=0.000$ ).

**Table 2** Absolute and relative values of respondents if they have ever experienced any situation of sexual harassment while at this university, according to current residence

Current residence	Have ever experienced sexual harassment				Total	
	No		Yes		Frequency	%
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%		
Same city of the Educational Institution	1136	42.41	366	37.54	1502	41.11
Another place in the same province	359	13.40	86	8.82	445	12.18
Other province	1184	44.19	523	53.64	1707	46.71
Total	2679	100	975	100	3654	100

$X^2 = 30,081 \text{ g.l.}; p = 0,000$

Table 3 is presented below, which shows the absolute values and relative values of the presence of sexual harassment in each academic unit of the HEI in the 2021 period. Overall, the academic unit with the highest number of students surveyed was the faculty of business administration with 829 students corresponding to 22.22%, followed by the faculty of public health with 708 students corresponding to 18.97%, followed by the faculty of sciences 519 students and natural resources 528 students corresponding to 13.91% and 14.15%, The Faculty of Livestock Sciences with 451 students and Computer Science and Electronics with 474 students corresponding to 12.09% and 12.70% Finally the faculty with the lowest number of respondents corresponds to mechanics with 222 students corresponding to 5.96%. There is a statistically significant relationship between the academic unit and whether they have presented sexual harassment within the university.

**Table 3** Absolute and relative values of students who have suffered some situation of sexual harassment distributed in the academic units in the period 2021

Academic unit in which you study	Have ever experienced sexual harassment				Total	
	No		Yes		Frequency	%
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%		
Business Administration	600	21.89	229	23.13	829	22.22
Sciences	367	13.39	152	15.35	519	13.91
Livestock Sciences	347	12.66	104	10.51	451	12.09
Computer Science and Electronics	360	13.13	114	11.52	474	12.70
Mechanics	182	6.64	40	4.04	222	5.96
Natural resources	430	15.69	98	9.89	528	14.15
Public health	455	16.60	253	25.56	708	18.97
Total	2741	100	990	100	3731	100

$X^2 = 63,038; p = 0,000$

Table 4 shows the absolute values and relative values of the presence of sexual harassment in the 2021 study period. During the study period, three evaluation times were determined until the middle of the study career, in the second half of the career and in the degree process, where it was determined that of the total population 507 students presented some situation of sexual harassment in the first half of their studies corresponding to 51.22%, 357 students presented sexual abuse in the second half of the career with 36.06% and 126 students presented some situation of sexual harassment in the degree process, observing a majority incidence in the first levels of study where students present some situation of sexual harassment and a statistically significant association is observed.

Table 5 presents the absolute values and relative values of the presence of sexual harassment according to the time spent in the university. As observed 320 students who have studied from 0 to 2 years in the university have suffered some situation of sexual harassment corresponding to 32.32%, in turn 491 students who studied from 3 to 4 years presented some situation of sexual harassment observing that the longer they have studied in the university the greater incidence of harassment present with 49.60% and 179 students have studied more than 4 years have suffered some situation of sexual harassment with 18.08%.

**Table 4.** Absolute and relative values of students who have experienced some situation of sexual harassment at some time while in this university during the 2021 study period.

Time in which you are in the studies	Have ever experienced sexual harassment				Total	
	No		Yes		Frequency	%
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%		
Until the middle of the race	1615	58.92	507	51.22	2122	56.88
In the second half of the race	853	31.12	357	36.06	1210	32.43
Titling process	273	9.96	126	12.72	399	10.69
Total	2741	100	990	100	3731	100

$X^2 = 18,280; p = 0,000$

**Table 5.** Absolute and relative values of students who have suffered some situation of sexual harassment at some time while in this university, according to time spent in the university

Years within the Higher Education Institution	Have ever experienced sexual harassment				Total	
	No		Yes		Frequency	%
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%		
From 0 to 2 years	1169	42.65	320	32.32	1489	39.91
From 3 to 4 years old	1162	42.39	491	49.60	1653	44.31
More than 4 years	410	14.96	179	18.08	589	15.79
Total	2741	100	990	100	3731	100

$X^2 = 32,439; p = 0,001$

Table 6 shows the absolute values and relative values of the presence of sexual harassment according to the marital status of students in the 2021 study period. It was determined that 951 students of single or unmarried marital status presented some situation of harassment within the university corresponding to 96.06%, followed by 18 students of married or married civil status corresponding to 1.81%, 17 students of civil status de facto union corresponding to 1.72% and 4 students of divorced or divorced marital status presented some situation of harassment corresponding to 0.40%. It is evident that there is no statistical relationship between marital status and the presence of sexual harassment.

Table 7 shows the absolute values and relative values of the presence of sexual harassment according to the coexistence of students in the 2021 study period. As evidenced, mostly students who live with relatives have presented some situation of sexual harassment since 86.26% of the total population presented harassment followed by students who live alone with 8.49% and with 4.65% students who live with their partner and 0.61% students who live with friends.

**Table 6.** Absolute and relative values of students who have suffered some situation of sexual harassment at some time while in this university, according to marital status

Marital status	Have ever experienced sexual harassment				Total	
	No		Yes		Frequency	%
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%		
Single or single	2552	93.11	951	96.06	3503	93.89
Married the married	92	3.36	18	1.81	110	2.95
De facto union	80	2.92	17	1.72	97	2.60
Widowed or widowed	1	0.04	0	0	1	0.03
Divorced or divorced	16	0.58	4	0.40	20	0.54
Total	2741	100	990	100	3731	100

$X^2 = 11,35 \text{ g.l}; p = 0,023$

**Table 7.** Absolute and relative values of students who have suffered some situation of sexual harassment at some time while in this university, according to coexistence.

Person you live with	Have ever experienced sexual harassment				Total	
	No		Yes		Frequency	%
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%		
Alone or alone	193	7.04	84	8.49	277	7.42
With my partner	182	6.64	46	4.65	228	6.11
With family members	2358	86.03	854	86.26	3212	86.09
With friends	8	0.29	6	0,61	14	0.38
Total	2741	100	990	100	3731	100

$X^2 = 8,689 \text{ g.l } 3; p = 0,034$

Table 8 below presents the absolute values and relative values of the presence of sexual harassment with respect to the employment-study relationship. Mostly the prevalence of sexual harassment is in students who only study with 62.52% and students who study and work presented 37.48%, and it is observed that there is no relationship between the relaxation of work and the presence of harassment.

Table 9 presents the absolute values and relative values of the presence of sexual harassment according to the social class of the students in the 2021 study period. It is observed that the presence of sexual harassment goes in the middle and lower-middle class with 47.28%, 38.59% respectively, followed by the lower class with 10.20% and the upper-middle class with 3.94%. Through the chi-square test, it was determined that the variables of social class and the presence of sexual harassment in students are not statistically associated.

**Table 8.** Absolute and relative values of students who have suffered some situation of sexual harassment at some time while in this university, according to dedication

Work-study relationship	Have ever experienced sexual harassment				Total	
	No		Yes		No.	%
	No.	%	No.	%		
Study and work	1131	41.26	371	37.48	1502	40.26
Just study	1610	58.74	619	62.52	2229	59.74
Total	2741	100	990	100	3731	100

$X^2 = 4,338$  g.l 1 ;  $p = 0,037$

**Table 9.** Absolute and relative values of students who have suffered some situation of sexual harassment at some time while in this university, according to social class

Social class	Have ever experienced sexual harassment				Total	
	No		Yes		Frequency	%
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%		
Loud	4	0.15	0	0	4	0.11
Medium-high	70	2.55	39	3,94	109	2.92
Media	1229	44.84	468	47.28	1697	45.48
Medium-low	1039	37.91	382	38.59	1421	38.09
Casualty	399	14.56	101	10.20	500	13.40
Total	2741	100	990	100	3731	100

$X^2 = 17,553$  g.l 4;  $p = 0,002$

As shown in Table 10, the absolute values and relative values of the presence of sexual harassment are presented according to the mobilization of students in the 2021 study period. Where there is a higher percentage of incidence of sexual harassment in students whose domicile is outside the city of the university with 64.04% and with 35.96% students that their domicile is within the same city of study.

Table 11 presents the absolute values and relative values of the presence of sexual harassment according to the origin of the students in the 2021 study period. Where there is a higher prevalence in students who come from the same province with 47.27%, followed by students from the provinces of the mountains with 30%, followed by students from coastal provinces with 13.13%, 8.79% students who come from the Amazon and minority students from Galapagos and another country with 0.30% and 0.50% respectively.

**Table 10.** Absolute and relative values of students that they have suffered some situation of sexual harassment at some time while in this university, according to mobilization

Mobilization	Have ever experienced sexual harassment				Total	
	No		Yes		Frequency	%
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%		
Within the same city	1136	41.45	366	35.96	1502	40.26
Out of town of the IES	1605	58.55	634	64.04	2229	59.74
Total	2741	100	990	100	3731	100

$X^2 = 6,056$  g.l. 1;  $p = 0,014$

**Table 11.** Absolute and relative values of students who have suffered some situation of sexual harassment at some time while in this university, according to migration

Origin	Have ever experienced sexual harassment				Total	
	No		Yes		Frequency	%
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%		
Same province of the IES	1439	52.50	468	47.27	1907	51.11
Another province of the mountains	814	29.70	297	30	1111	29.78
Another coastal province	256	9.34	130	13.13	386	10.35
Province of the Amazon	212	7.73	87	8.79	299	8.01
Galapagos	4	0.15	3	0.30	7	1.88
Other country	16	0.58	5	0.50	21	0.56
Total	2741	100	990	100	3731	100

$X^2 = 16,060$  g.l 5;  $p = 0,007$

## Discussion

Gender inequality has been characterized over time by a number of abuses against the integrity of people and there is no place where this has not occurred (9). From this connotation in recent decades, interest has been demonstrated in the development of research on sexual harassment, since it has been a form of violence that shares features and manifestations with an individual and even more so that occurs in any environment, whether public and private (10). Therefore, it is essential to put interest in the university environment since it is a space where multiple violences occur such as physical, psychological, sexual, virtual, among others.

Currently in Ecuador it has been a subject little treated because these demonstrations are not denounced due to fear of inequality of power or discredit of the person or the institution (11). Based on the above, several investigations have set their sights on this environment to determine the presence of sexual harassment in the HEIs. In a study of the National University of Loja, it was determined that, of the total of 2166 students in the period of October, November, December 2020 and January 2021, 67.91% have presented some situation of sexual harassment and corresponds to women, within its analysis it mentions that 15.74% state that they have suffered some type of sexual harassment during their stay within the university campus (12). In turn, a study of 3731 students from a public university in Ecuador determined the prevalence of sexual harassment was verbal (18.1%), followed by non-verbal

harassment (16.5%), physical harassment (9.6%) and harassment due to abuse of power and blackmail (3.9%), mentioning that this type of violence is presented mostly to female students (13).

With respect to the faculty belonging to the students, it was determined that the faculty of business administration presented mostly with 22.22%, followed by the faculty of public health with 18.97%, followed by the faculty of sciences and natural resources corresponding to 13.91% and 14.15%, the faculty of livestock sciences and computer science and electronics with 12.09% and 12.70% respectively finally the faculty with the lowest number of respondents corresponds to mechanics with 5.96%. Contrasting the data obtained with their respective percentages, the research at the National University of Loja is observed, where it was determined that the faculties with the highest number of cases of sexual harassment are the Faculty of Agriculture and Renewable Natural Resources with 5.3%, followed by the Faculty of Social and Administrative Law with 4.94%, the Faculty of Education. Art and Communication with a percentage of 4.48%, the Faculty of Human Health represented by 3.78%, with the Faculty of Energy, Industries and Non-Renewable Natural Resources and the Distance Studies Unit with fewer cases of sexual harassment with 0.78% and 0.37%, observing great variability according to the study variable(12).

Regarding social class in the present study it was determined that there is an incidence of sexual harassment in the middle and lower-middle class with 47.28%, 38.59% respectively, followed by the lower class with 10.20% and the upper-middle class with 3.94%. Similar relative values are observed in the study conducted in the city of Quito on gender violence in university students, denoting results with greater frequency of sexual harassment in the upper middle class with 46.2%, followed by the lower class with 43.4% and middle with 37.6% (11), which ratifies that sexual harassment does not distinguish social stratum (13).

As evidenced in this study, sexual harassment in educational institutions is currently a subject that should be addressed without any taboo, because there are high percentages of the incidence of this type of violence, being of indispensable interest to the competent authorities of educational institutions, including legislatively in the Organic Law on Higher Education (14), Article 207, literal b) legally specifies sexual harassment within the HEIs, being a mechanism so that this type of abuse does not remain silent, thereby contributing to the improvement of the university environment.

## **Conclusions**

The presence of sexual harassment in university establishments is being exposed in various ways at present this research allows to visualize the incidence within a public university of Ecuador manifesting some factors that increase its incidence such as social class, marital status, time of permanence of study, origin, being factors that are statistically associated with the incidence of sexual harassment.

Therefore, it becomes essential that Higher Education Institutions implement plans and actions within their environment establishing protocols for reporting and supporting victims of sexual harassment within the university, in turn it becomes necessary to promote the university estates where aspects related to sexual harassment are stipulated. All this in search of eradicating sexual harassment in the places of its development in the Institutions of Higher Education with what would contribute to the integral development of the community and its possible survivors.

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